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ABSTRACT

It is doubtful that federal programs are effective in initiating and maintaining improvements in education. Longitudinal studies of Head Start children and other studies commissioned by the Department of Education have indicated no proof that schools improved as a result of these federally funded programs. Project Developmental Continuity (PDC), initiated in 1974-75, is a case in point. The aim of PDC was to promote continuity in educational and comprehensive child development services for children making the transition from Head Start to elementary school. The project was implemented in twelve racially and ethnically diverse communities. Although initial project evaluation results have shown that PDC had a positive impact on parents, teachers, and school curricula, an important goal of the project, to develop innovative program models that can be replicated in other sites, may not be realized. From observing three PDC sites, factors that preclude dissemination of strong program models become apparent. They include frequent school staff turnover, competing federal and state programs, and shifting political and socioeconomic factors in the community. Problems originating in the federal bureaucracy also cause delays and confusion. (FG)

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FEDERAL EFFORTS TO PROMOTE INNOVATIVE
SCHOOLING: CAN THEY SUCCEED?

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Federal Efforts To Promote Innovative Schooling: Can They Succeed?

Since the advent of "Reagonomics" with the severe curtailment of federal funding to support improved instruction in the public schools for various populations of children with special needs, reflecting on the efficacy of federal funds in education may be of dubious value. Nevertheless, continued scrutiny of federally funded programs is relevant to determine if reduced funding will affect achievement for targeted children, as well as how to use limited funds for the highest impact on instruction.

The decades of the 1960's and 70's were the peak years for attempts at federally funded innovations in education to improve learning for American public school children, particularly children of the poor. As evaluations of initial projects began to accumulate, many were assessed as failures in terms of enhanced academic achievement. Early evaluations of Head Start (Westinghouse Learning Corporation, 1970) found that early IQ gains made by Head Start children were eroded by second or third grade. However, as longitudinal studies followed Head Start children as they progressed through elementary and secondary school, Lazar and Darlington (1979) reported that Head Start children were less likely to be assigned to special education classes or retained in grade.

Follow Through, an extension of Head Start suffered the same fate as other innovations in the expectation of higher academic achievement for students. Although controversy surrounds the Follow Through evaluation (House, Glass, McLean and Walker, 1978), Richard Anderson of Abc Associates which conducted the Follow Through evaluations, concluded that federal

programs have failed to help poor children achieve in school on a par with children who are not poor (Brandt, 1978).

Educational leaders have proposed various causes for the poor results in educational innovations. Benham (1977), who was interested in attempts at open education, attributed its failure to a philosophical disagreement between teachers and innovators who designed the programs. Benham advocates that schools in the United States operated within a philosophy that is traditional and deterministic, while the proposed reforms reflected a contemporary and relativistic attitude. Benham proposes that efforts at open education failed because teachers were expected to implement change models which were based on a philosophy very different from their own beliefs. Because they did not agree with the change model, they were not committed to making it work.

Sarason (1971) further describes the dichotomy between the innovator and the personnel of the selected site as resulting from a lack of understanding on both sides. The outside change agent failed to understand the culture of the school and have the unique interactions of personalities within the school and the surrounding community impacted upon the attempts to initiate the change. Representatives of the school culture likewise hesitated to accept the outside agent and were suspicious of the desired innovation. Sarason concludes that "the more things change the more they remain the same," (Ibid, p. 46) and the intended outcomes were not achieved because new programs were unrelated to the realities of the school culture.

John Goodlad has recently completed a longitudinal study of schooling in America and seems pessimistic about effecting improvement if present conditions and policies continue (Goodlad, 1979). Goodlad faults federal

requirements, standardized tests to measure success, and increased schooling, among other causes, because they reduce the autonomy of the local school and family. Although he sees local autonomy as one key to improving the school, Goodlad asserts that outsiders perceive the institution as incapable of improving itself. Goodlad concludes from his investigations that schools will not be improved by funded intervention. Rather, school improvement must come from within because the school has a mission, the principal assumes the role of educational leader, and the broader structure of the school system is supportive of the school's efforts. Finally, Goodlad states that schools will improve only if they are reconstructed from their present form with educators working with parents and students. He questions whether educators are up to the task.

The "lawn party" hypothesis is also advocated as a cause for the nonsuccess of federal programs (Farrar, Dr. Sanctis and Cohen, 1980). The authors proposed that the federal government (the host) has one goal for the party, while the local education agencies (the guests) have differing reasons for attending the gathering. As a result, the local groups used the program in different ways - and often do as they pleased. The consequences in the differing expectations in the lawn party approach result in a difference between the original federal intent for the funding and the subsequent local implementation.

In discussing difficulties with Head Start and Follow Through programs, the authors reported:

"Site visits revealed that models in practice were even more complex than they had seemed on paper. Site interpretations of the models varied from time to time and place to place; even the developers' ideas about the

models changed over time; and it was not clear whose standard of implementation should prevail (p. 167)."

The lawn party approach to funding resulted in a difference between federal intent for funding and subsequent local implementation which is not necessarily the result of federal mismanagement or local resistance; nonetheless, local education agencies failed to do what was expected of them.

Orlich (1979) also questions the role of the federal government. As Orlich views the difficulty with implementing innovation, the federal Congress has assumed responsibility for initiating change and the public schools have become the instrument for effecting social, economic, and political change. Among other causes of failure of federal engineering of educational change Orlich proposes that federal policymakers underestimate how long it takes to produce change and overestimate the impact that federal influences have on state and local educational agencies.

In two studies conducted by the Rand Corporation for the Education Department, it was reported that school systems that operate more than one federal education program are likely to experience problems between federally sponsored programs and regular classes. In the initial study using interviews with administrators and teachers the researchers reported that "they found evidence that federal categorical programs are implemented in such a way that they 'interfere' with the 'core local program'..." (p. 10) Local administrators caused the "interference" when too many programs were operating in each school (White, 1981).

Project Developmental Continuity (PDC) was another experimental project designed to extend the gains of Head Start. Administered by the Adminis-

tration for Children, Youth and Families, the aim of PDC was to promote greater continuity in educational and comprehensive child development services for children as they make the transition from Head Start to the elementary school. A specific goal of the project was to develop models for developmental continuity that could be implemented on a wide scale in Head Start and child development programs and school systems.

Project Developmental Continuity was initiated with a planning year in 1974-75. Using a "local variation" model, each site was expected to develop locally appropriate strategies within the program component areas of education, administration, developmental support services, preservices and inservice training, and services for handicapped and bilingual children. Within the 12 sites, there was a high level of diversity in local settings and ethnic groups which included Navaho, Hispanics, Black and Appalachian children. Children from Cambodia, Vietnam and Thailand were later served at two sites. Two sites were bilingual - bicultural demonstration programs.

Project evaluation was funded to an independent evaluator (High Scope Educational Research Foundation) to collect and analyze information as to the extent to which the project aims were implemented and PDC's impact on children, teachers, and parents. Evaluation included one or more comparison groups within the same school system of each site.

In the first phase of evaluation process data was collected to examine the implementation process and to determine the feasibility for conducting an evaluation of implementation results. The second phase of evaluation was to compare Head Start children and their families who attended a PDC project with a comparison group of Head Start children and their families who did not attend a PDC project. A summary of results (Rosario, J. and

Clement, J., 1980) to date are as follows:

- 1) PDC had an impact on parents, involving them more fully in school life.
- 2) PDC had an impact on teacher attitudes and classroom practices.
- 3) PDC had an impact on the schools by helping to redefine curriculum as the entire network of programs.
- 4) Scores on outcome measures at the end of first grade did not differ significantly from scores of comparison children. This conclusion is tentative because PDC and non PDC children will be compared through the third grade. The final evaluation will not be reported until sometime in 1982.

An important goal of the project, to develop innovative program models which can be replicated by other sites, may not be realized. Although no definitive results of this goal have yet been gathered, this field specialist who has worked directly with three of the 12 project sites during the years of implementation has been able to informally observe factors which will possibly preclude the dissemination of strong program models. It is possible to propose some factors which cause innovative program models to be difficult to implement and maintain.

1) The frequent turnover in school administrators and project coordinators has resulted in a diluted understanding of project goals and commitment to development of the model. Among the criteria that Goodlad (1979) proposed for successful schools is the central role played by the principal. There has been a change in leadership roles of the principal, project coordinator, or both in at least four of the 12 PDC schools. Because newer administrators were not part of the original planning, training, and implementation, they are not as knowledgeable of

the locally designed model developed during the PDC planning year.

Administrators who entered PDC projects in final funding years had to spend time adjusting to the new position and learning about PDC and the characteristics of the local model. Much time was inevitably lost in the short life of the project as administrators established themselves in the new position and evolved their own reactions to what the project should contribute to the school. As newer administrators wrestled with their own goals for school improvement, the original PDC objectives were often lost or given a lower priority. An interim report by High Scope (Rosario, et al., 1980) attributed lack of administrative support partly due to changes in leadership as specific cause of lack of full implementation of PDC at one site.

2) Frequent turnover in teaching and support personnel resulted in staff members who lacked the intensive training given original site staff. A weakened implementation of the model at some sites can be attributed to lack of systematic staff development to prepare newer staff for teaching at the PDC site. The result was teachers who had a significantly different perspective of the goals of PDC. Their own philosophy of their role as a teacher may not have compatible with PDC goals. As authors cited above proposed about other projects, teachers initially trained for project implementation may have actively supported the philosophy of PDC, or they may have lacked commitment or actually resisted the change. Newer teachers who were later added to the project did not understand the philosophy of PDC or how the local model should be implemented. They consequently tended to teach using their own views as to what constitutes effective instruction, rather than the methodology originally implemented

through PDC.

3) The presence of competing federal and state projects in site schools distracted site personnel from commitment to PDC goals and philosophy. Similar to information from the Rand Report, at one PDC site, six federally funded experimental projects were funded and implemented concurrently. Administrators and teachers categorized PDC as one of many programs they were using. As a result, an educational component was never considered to be relevant. In some schools teachers did not attribute any separate significance to PDC; indeed, some teachers were only dimly aware that such a project had been planned and implemented. At another site different federally funded experimental models funded from several sources were established in various district schools. Feelings of competition between schools lowered morale among PDC staff members.

Sarason (1971) discussed the problem of leadership within a school when central office administrators made decisions to implement new programs "His dilemma in leadership is further aggravated by the fact that often proposed changes for his school (e.g. the introduction of a new curriculum) do not come from him but from sources in the system ('downtown') (p. 130)." Administrators and teachers in PDC project schools were often confused and frustrated by the conflicting requirements of different federal projects. In many cases teachers were not aware of which project funded their position nor did they understand the implications of the funding. Because administrators and teachers at one site felt PDC had been imposed on them by the school district as another way to obtain federal money, no one felt ownership or accountability for the program at the local school.

4) Shifting socio-economic condition, political forces among administrators and governing boards had a detrimental effect on implementation of PDC goals at some school sites. Although teachers, administrators, parents, community representatives and consultants designed the local model together during the planning year, social and economic conditions and governing board memberships changed during the implementation years and school district administrators reflected shifts in local situations, other priorities superceded PDC in attention. Bilingual-bicultural emphasis were one victim of changing conditions. The influx of English speaking children at one site was reported to be the reason for the move away from bilingual instruction, while the "back-to-basics" movement resulted in a lowered priority for bilingual-bicultural curriculum at another site.

The conflict between PDC curriculum and the school district curriculum was also present at several sites. The High Scope Interim Report X explained: "In a few sites PDC staff developed a PDC curriculum early in the program but were forced to retreat to the district curriculum after a couple of years" (1980, p. 52). Whatever the cause, various PDC sites had completely abandoned the unique modes and methodologies of teaching that made them different from local comparison schools before the end of the funding period. Whether the problem stemmed from changing administrators and teachers, shifting social, economic, or political, forces bringing pressure from the community many site schools had completely dismantled the PDC curriculum model before the end of the funding period.

5) Problems originating from federal bureaucracy caused delays throughout the life of PDC. Administrators in public schools serving

students with federal programs have long endured the frustrations connected with bureaucratic problems originating in Washington. Late notices of funding, tardiness in dispensing funds and changing interpretations of federal policies are but a few of the bureaucratic tangles that affect the successful implementation of projects, including PDC. From information on proposal writing to visits by off-site evaluators PDC sites were hampered in making and carrying out plans because clearance on relevant instructions had not been received from Washington. For example, all sites were affected by lack of clarity in how program models were to be described for possible dissemination. Late in the project period sites were instructed to develop model descriptions. After a workshop in Washington for project site representatives, site visits by field specialists, extensive group meetings at the sites, and preliminary attempts at writing, the requirement was quietly dropped with little explanation.

Conflicting federal regulations were the cause of the failure of the social services support system developed at a PDC school serving incoming Cambodian, Vietnamese and other refugees of the Vietnamese War. Support and assistance for the new refugees was effectively destroyed when the district was forced to bus the children to other schools to achieve racial balance, because there was no way to continue to serve the refugee families. PDC was not present in other district schools to provide support services. The parents did not have enough familiarity with the community or command of English to locate their children's school and other sources of social services. Few owned cars to travel to the school in any event; consequently, a key resource to ease the adjustment to living and working

in a strange country was taken away.

• Summary

The effectiveness of federal programs to initiate and maintain improvements in schooling remains in serious doubt. The determination of successes and failures in PDC project sites is yet to be reported from the evaluation research done by High Scope Educational Research foundation. Although Dittman (1980) reported improvements and refinements in federally funded projects as they continue to learn from past mistakes, it has not yet been proven that schools have improved as the result of federal funds. Some components of Project Developmental Continuity may survive in altered forms to affect children in a positive manner at former PDC sites; however in terms of curriculum and instruction, lack of continuity within models put many site models at risk. It may well be that the "lawn party" and other hypotheses for the failure of federally funded programs to result in improved learning in the public schools also affected PDC sites and the guests were attending other parties.

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